it is safe to say that this account of knowledge as veridical doxa legitimated by adequate evidence involves the following evolution: First, in the *Regulæ* 'all knowledge' is apprehended as 'certain and evident cognition',[147] whereas there is neither any statement of a general rule to the effect that whatever human beings clearly and distinctly perceive is also true nor any argument to the effect that God guarantees that it be so. In fact, in the *Regulæ* God does not appear to have very much at all to do with what constitutes knowledge.

Then, in the 'Metaphysical Correspondence' Descartes has God both make and keep truths true, for, in the case of a primary and ultimate set of truths, to wit, the eternal truths, the deity both creates and preserves them, and, in this sense, already guarantees their existence and validity. Thus, too, there could hardly be human verities without the divine veracity.

Next, in the *Discourse* Descartes claims as a general rule that the things that human beings conceive very clearly and very distinctly are all true, he couples clarity and distinctness systematically as the criterion of truth, and, in doing so, he appeals to the supernatural assistance of the divine veracity, whereas he refrains from claiming *expressis verbis* that he were proposing a 'demonstration' of or a 'proof' for the universality and necessity of the rule-governed connection between evidence and truth.

Furthermore, in the *Meditations* Descartes repeatedly asserts that the general rule of truth, namely, that all those things which human beings clearly and distinctly perceive are also true, and, to be sure, in that very manner in which they clearly and distinctly perceive them, has been, is being, or will be, 'demonstrated' or 'proved', and, once again, he appeals to God as the author of all clear and distinct perceptions and thus as the guarantor of the validity of the said rule, whereas he offers no definitions of the basic concepts of evidence, namely, 'clarity' and 'distinctness'.

Finally, in the *Principles* Descartes, still wrestling with the specter that what seems most evident to human beings might be utterly false,[148] recurs to the doctrine of the eternal truths,[149] he once again appeals to God as the guarantor of the relationship between evidence and truth,[150] he lays down clarity and distinctness as the dual criteria

[147] See R. 2, § 1.

[148] See the hyperbolic formulation of *Principia philosophiae*, I, § 30: '… the most serious doubt [summa illa dubitatio], which arose therefrom that we did not know whether we might not be of such a nature [natura] that we would err even in those matters which seemed to us to be most evident [evidentissima] …'. Cf., e.g., ibid., I, §§ 5 and 13.

[149] See ibid., I, § 48: 'All the objects of our perception [perceptio] may be regarded either as things [res] or as affections of things [affectiones rerum], or as eternal truths [aeternae veritates].' This paragraph lists the former. The next (§ 49) does the latter: 'It is not possible, or even necessary, to enumerate the eternal truths … . … the proposition, "nothing comes from nothing", is regarded … as an eternal truth [veritas quaedam aeterna] which resides in our mind [in mente nostra], and such truths are termed "common notions or axioms" [communis notio sive axioma]. Of this class [genus] are the following: "It is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be at the same time." "What is done cannot be undone." "He who is thinking cannot but exist while he is thinking." There are innumerable others, all of which it would not be easy to list … .'

[150] See ibid., I, § 13: 'In which sense knowledge [cognitio] of all other things depends on the knowledge [cognitio] of God.' And I, § 29: 'God is not the cause of errors [causa errorum].' Finally, I, § 30: '… the light of nature [lumen naturae] or faculty of knowledge [facultas cognoscendi] which God has given to us can never encompass any object which were not true in so far as it is indeed encompassed by this faculty, that is, in so far as it is clearly and distinctly perceived [clare et distincte

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of truth[151] – arguing that whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is also true –,[152] and he defines 'clear perception' and 'distinct perception',[153] whereas the problem remains that he stops at some modes of evidence and never arrives at the substance of evidence – hardly defining 'clarity' and 'distinctness' per se.

There are several remarkable things about all this. *First*, as has been indicated, in the *Regulæ* one finds no reference whatsoever to the eternal truths, no statement of the general rule of truth that all that which human beings clearly and distinctly perceive is true, and no appeal to God as the guarantor of the universality and of the necessity of the connection between evidence and truth. In this respect, the *Regulæ* are already unique.

Second, in the *Regulæ* one does find neater and cleaner observations on 'evidence' than in any of the other principal works examined.[154] The justification for this claim is that the *Regulæ* are also unique in the sense that there Descartes refuses to be distracted from the crux of the theory of knowledge, namely, the philosophy of evidence. All the other texts, from the 'Metaphysical Correspondence' to the *Principles*, fall into foundationalist quicksand by trying to legitimate evidence in terms of something other than itself, neglecting to understand that, whatever else this might be, it, too, would have to be legitimated in terms of evidence. To be sure, this would not be problematic for anyone willing to admit that philosophizing itself is inherently circular. None the less, this would not be acceptable to a practicing foundationalist. And Descartes, after all, is searching, above all, for 'fundamenta certa et inconcussa'.[155]

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percipitur]. For God would deserve to be called a deceiver [deceptor] if the faculty which he had given to us were so perverse [perversa] that it mistook the false for the true even when we were using it properly.' Cf. I, § 31 ff.

151 See ibid., I, § 30: '… all the things that we clearly perceive [omnia quae clare percipimus] are true … .' And I, § 43: 'We never err when we assent only to the things that have been clearly and distinctly perceived [solis clare et distincte perceptis].' Finally, §§ 33 and 44 describe what is likely to happen if one judges about things perceived only vaguely and obscurely.

152 Once again, there is a distinction between moral certainty and absolute certainty (ibid., IV, §§ 205–206). 'Moral' (*moraliter*) certainty suffices for the practice of life, whereas 'absolute' (*absolute*) certainty makes use of the metaphysical foundation (*fundamentum metaphysicum*) that God – benevolent, veracious, and creative – guarantees the reliability of the human cognitive faculties properly employed.

153 See ibid., I, § 45: 'What is a "clear perception" [perceptio clara] and what is a "distinct perception" [perceptio distincta]. … Of a perception which can be used as the basis for a certain and indubitable judgment [certum et indubitatum judicium] it is required, not only that it be clear, but also that it be distinct. I call a "clear perception" one which is present and overt to the attentive mind [menti attendenti praesens et aperta]: just as we say that we see those things clearly which, being present to the intuiting eye, stimulate it strongly and overtly enough. And I call a "distinct perception" one which, when it be clear, is so distinguished from all other perceptions and so precise [ab omnibus aliis ita sejuncta et praecisa] that it contain within itself nothing other than what is clear.' And § 46: 'The example of pain [dolor] shows that a perception can be clear without being distinct, but cannot be distinct without being clear. … For example, when one feels an intense pain, the perception that one has of it is indeed very clear [clarissima], but it is not always distinct. … Hence a perception can be clear without being distinct, but not distinct without being clear.'

154 Cf. R. 2, §§ 1, 2, and 5 (2x), R. 3, R. 3, §§ 1, 3 (2x), and 7–8 (2x in 8), R. 4, § 4, R. 5, § 2, R. 7, §§ 4–6, R. 8, § 4, R. 10, §§ 3–5, R. 12, §§ 14, 16, and 22–24 (2x in 23), R. 14, §§ 6 and 14, R. 15, § 1, and R. 16, § 5.

155 See *Meditations*, Synopsis, § 1, Meditation I, §§ 1–2, II, §§ 1 and 4, etc.

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Third, Descartes never – not even in the *Regulæ* – poses the decisive question: 'What is evidence?' Had he done so, he would have had a better chance of grasping the intrinsic inadequacy of his entire 'mature' – *lucus a non lucendo* – account of knowledge. For, since knowledge inevitably involves evidence, no account of knowledge can suffice which does not take seriously the centrality of evidence. The point here is not that Descartes should have tried to give a single universally valid definition of 'evidence',[156] but rather that he might have focused on something without consideration of which knowledge cannot be made to make much sense.

So the development sketched is one in which Descartes, in trying to articulate the nature, acquisition, and limits of human knowledge, attaches decreasingly less weight to evidence, and increasingly more, to God. Thus, whereas the *Regulæ* appeal extensively to evidence but hardly mention God, the *Meditations* proper do not use the word 'evidentia' even once yet appeal to God on almost innumerable occasions. The movement is from the *problem* of a multitude of complex rules, thirty-six, to be exact, which do not really guarantee the human, all too human, achievement of truth, to a 'solution' involving a divine guarantee for – 'e pluribus unum' – a single, simple 'general rule of truth'. From this, one legitimate inference is that, the more 'advanced' Descartes' theory of knowledge becomes, the farther it removes itself from specifically epistemological and methodological concerns and the more inextricably entangled it becomes in theological and metaphysical matters. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that in the end Descartes seeks the foundations of epistemology in theology by elaborating what amounts to 'a theological theory of evidence'.[157]

Thus the Descartes of the *Regulæ* does not flee from philosophy to theology in order to propose solutions to the problems connected with the fact that evidence is rarely, if ever, *absolute* or *adequate* or *apodictic* – to say nothing of its being all three at once. Nor is he very fond of the facile examples of 'triple-A type' evidence,

[156] The dangers of such an enterprise are exposed, intentionally or not, in the *Theaetetus*, where the grasp at the universal (cf., e.g., 145 c–148 e) leads, not only to contempt for specific differences (cf., e.g., 200 d–201 c), but also to the notion that the individual is inexpressible (cf., e.g., 208 c–210 b).

[157] Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie. Fünf Vorlesungen* (1907), ed. W. Biemel (The Hague, 1950 – Husserliana vol. II), *Erste Philosophie (1923/24). Erster Teil: Kritische Ideengeschichte*, ed. R. Boehm (The Hague, 1956 – Hua. VII), *Erste Philosophie (1923/24). Zweiter Teil: Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*, ed. R. Boehm (The Hague, 1959 – Hua. VIII), *Formale und transzendentale Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft* (1929), ed. P. Janssen (The Hague, 1974 – Hua. XVII), *Cartesianische Meditationen. Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie* (1931), ed. S. Strasser (The Hague, 1950 – Hua. I), and *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie* (1936), ed. W. Biemel (The Hague, 1954 – Hua. VI). Thus phenomenology is not a brand of Neo-Cartesianism. To be sure, the *Cartesian Meditations*, perhaps Husserl's most widely read work, grew out of lectures held at the Sorbonne and first appeared as: *Méditations cartésiennes. Introduction à la phénoménologie*, trans. A. Koyré, E. Levinas, and G. Peiffer (Paris, 1931). None the less, even here Husserl asserts from the outset that he rejects virtually the entire content of the Cartesian philosophy – and this holds especially for what has to do with 'evidence'. But author's intent and reader's response are two different things. Cf. my study 'An Essay in Epistemic Kuklophobia: Husserl's Critique of Descartes' Conception of Evidence', *Husserl Studies*, vol. 13 (1997), pp. 89–140.

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knowledge, and truth for which he would later become (in)famous.[158] On the contrary, the *Regulæ* provide no quick and easy cures for the epistemic infirmities which plague the 'mature' Descartes, namely, that evidence is *relative* because the temporal dimension alone renders it subject to incessant revision by further evidence,[159] *incomplete* because all clarity and distinctness exist under a comprehensive horizon of vagueness and obscurity,[160] and *questionable* because hardly anything can be proved 'beyond a reasonable doubt' – after all, *reasonable doubt presupposes reasonable doubters*.[161] All three leitmotifs have in common that evidence is a matter of degrees, of grades, and of levels, and that the criteria for what is to count as 'evident' can vary, not only by discipline, but also by object of study within the same. In no case can one employ method as the means to the end of establishing the monarchy of a mathematical measure over all matters.[162] To be sure, the Descartes of the *Regulæ* may not fully appreciate all this. None the less, he also does not claim to be an epistemic Baron von Münchhausen.[163]

Now the reasons for the metamorphosis from methodology to metaphysics are multifarious. Here what counts is that the best way to become acquainted with the *critical* Descartes is by studying the *Regulæ*. For this Descartes – though not nearly as familiar to many – is at least as philosophically stimulating as the *dogmatic* Descartes of the *Meditations*.

[158] Cf., e.g., the notorious case of, say, '2 + 2 = 4', as suggested in the *Discourse* (AT, VI, 21): 'In this [i.e., in systematic attempts to arrive at solutions to problems in geometrical analysis and in algebra] I shall not appear to you to be too vain, perhaps, if you will consider that, there being but one truth with respect to each thing, whoever finds it knows as much about it as one can know about it; and that, for example, a child who has been instructed in arithmetic and who has made an addition following its rules can be assured of having found, concerning the sum that he was examining, all that which the human mind would know how to find.' The point is that not only is the underlying epistemic model suggested here not transferable to other domains, but it is also not even valid for mathematics in general.

[159] On the problem of the duration of the validity and thus of the reliability of evidence over time cf., e.g., Meditation V, §§ 13–16, as well as AT, VII, 124–126, 140–141, 143–146, 214, and 245–246.

[160] For a trenchant analysis of how the lower forms of evidence provide the background to the higher ones cf., e.g., Meditation IV, passim, a seminal text on the horizontality of consciousness.

[161] Cf., e.g., the legal definition of 'reasonable doubt' in the Anglo-Saxon sense (emphasis added): '*A "reasonable doubt"* is such a doubt as would cause *a reasonable* and prudent *man* in the graver and more important affairs of life to pause and hesitate to act upon the truth of the matter charged.' See *Black's Law Dictionary*, ed. H. C. Black et al. (St. Paul, 1990), p. 492 (also pp. 161 and 1265). As Descartes' *Meditations* show, the question about the constitution of reasonable doubt leads directly into the problem of the nature of human rationality.

[162] Cf. the genial insight of Aristotle on this point, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094 b 10–1095 a 13.

[163] Cf. Hans Albert, *Traktat über kritische Vernunft* (Tübingen, 1968/1991), passim. In the 'Münchhausen Trilemma', directed against epistemic foundationalism, there are three unacceptable consequences to which the postulate of a sufficient 'justification' ('Begründung') is supposed to lead: (1) an infinite regress, (2) a logical circle, or (3) the breaking-off of the procedure at a certain point. The first is impracticable, the second, problematic, and the third, the most acceptable under the circumstances, though it threatens to degenerate into dogmatism – as, it may be added, with Descartes' 'mature' approach. The locus classicus for the trilemma is found in Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, bk. I, ch. XV (cf. bk. II, ch. III ff.). Cf. also Montaigne, 'An Apology for Raymond Sebond', *Essays*, ed. and trans. M. A. Screech (London, 1987/1991), bk. II, ch. 12, pp. 679–680.

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Philosophy: The Architectonic Argument of the 'Regulæ'

Perhaps the single most important thing to remember in trying to understand the *Regulæ* is that they represent only a fragment. Now it is an old topos in hermeneutics that understanding is an inherently, but not viciously, circular procedure.[164] That is, one cannot understand the whole, which comprises the parts, until one has understood the parts, which compose the whole – and vice versa. In the case of that whole which lacks some parts, the difficulty is exacerbated. Still, one has no other choice but to begin with a preliminary understanding of what is to be understood. So what peculiar logic of parts and wholes lies at the roots of the *Regulæ*?

If one follows Descartes' intentions regarding the structure and content of the *Regulæ* as indicated in Rules 8 and 12,[165] then one can say, once again, that the work as a whole was originally meant to contain three parts, each one comprising twelve rules. The first part, composed of Rules 1 through 12, is almost complete, with only two apparently minor lacunae, the one in the middle of Rule 8 and the other toward the end of Rule 12.[166] But already the second part, which would be composed of Rules 13 through 24, is significantly incomplete, for only Rules 13 through 17 are complete (with the exception of a lacuna in the middle of Rule 13),[167] while, on the other hand, Rule 18 itself may be incomplete (with a possible lacuna at the end);[168] also, this set ends abruptly at Rule 21, and only the headings of Rules 19, 20, and 21 are given – indeed, Rules 22, 23, and 24 are completely missing. Yet the final set of twelve rules, which would have comprised Rules 25 through 36, does not appear any longer to exist at all – if it ever did. Thus the project was left unfinished – and substantially so.

Now the first set of twelve rules is concerned with 'simple propositions' as well as with the two modes of inference by means of which they are known, namely, intuition and deduction. Thus this part could have well been entitled: 'On How To Infer Methodically'. The second set of twelve rules deals with those 'problems' or 'questions' in which the object under investigation is a unique function of the data and which can be expressed in the form of an equation. Problems of this sort are confined mainly and mostly to the sphere of mathematics. Thus this part could have fittingly been entitled: 'On Perfectly Understood Questions'. The third set of twelve rules would have treated of those 'problems' or 'questions' which, due to the heterogeneity of the data involved, resist expression in the form of an equation. Problems of this sort play a prominent role

[164] On the hermeneutical significance of the logic of parts and wholes see Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900/1901), vol. II, pt. 1, *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis* (Husserliana vol. XIX/1), ed. U. Panzer (The Hague/Boston/Lancaster, 1984), Third Investigation; Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Halle a. d. Saale, 1927), § 2 ff.; and Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (1960), *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. I: *Hermeneutik I* (Tübingen, 1986), pp. 76, 179–180, 194–195, 202, 227–228, 296, and 463. Cf. also below, R. 12, § 26, and R. 13, §§ 4 and 6.

[165] For R. 8, §§ 10–11, and R. 12, § 27, see AT, X, 399–400 and 428–430. Many other places provide insight into the structure of the *Regulæ*, e.g., R. 7, § 10 (ibid., p. 392), R. 8, § 1 (pp. 392–393), R. 13, §§ 1–2 (pp. 430–432), R. 14, § 6 (p. 441), R. 16, § 7 (p. 459), R. 17, §§ 1–2 (pp. 459–461), etc.

[166] See AT, X, 396 and 428.

[167] See ibid., p. 434.

[168] See ibid., p. 468.

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in the empirical sciences, for example, in physics. Thus this part could have appropriately been entitled: 'On Imperfectly Understood Questions'. Therefore the grand plan of the *Regulæ* would appear to consist of Descartes' attempt to show that and how 'imperfectly understood questions' can be reduced to 'perfectly understood questions'.[169] Of course, these observations justify the demand for an answer to the question: Why did Descartes break off the work on the *Regulæ* – because of a realization of the unrealizability of the ideal?

Since both the Latin original and the English translation of this edition are provided with numerous footnotes connecting the texts of the rules externally to their contexts as well as with copious cross-references relating these texts internally to each other, the ensuing remarks seek to offer only a sketch of the logical scaffolding of the *Regulæ* – a kind of 'vade tecum' for the reader à la Theseus' thread through the labyrinth.[170] For, if one were to combine certain formal aspects of the work, some of which are missing, with certain material moments, most of which are available, then one might attempt to outline its structure and content. Thus, in the following remarks, the pattern of interpretation is as follows: There is, first, a paraphrase of the rule; then, a statement of the argument of the rule (italicized); next, a commentary on the rule, in which the sentences of the commentary correspond one-to-one to the paragraphs of the elucidation of the rule; and, finally, a formulation of the decisive question(s) of the rule (also italicized). It is also worth noting that the rules themselves are mostly *normative*, whereas their elucidations are mostly *descriptive*.

Part One, comprising three sections of four rules each, proposes a methodology of inference for simple propositions.

Section One, consisting of Rules 1–4, seeks to establish the general importance of systematic procedure in scientific research.

According to Rule 1, the purpose of studies should be the direction of the natural intelligence toward the formation of reliable and veridical judgments about all the things that it encounters. *The argument is about whether science is to imitate the arts, which are supposed to differ by particular subjects and by specific objects, or to be oriented on wisdom, which is supposed to remain identical regardless of who applies it and to what.* For, to employ a metaphor, 'universal wisdom' (*sapientia universalis*) – which is not to be confused with 'universal mathematics' (*mathesis universalis*) – is said to be no more distinguished by the different subjects and objects to which it relates than the light of the sun is by the variety of the things on which it shines. *Therefore the question concerns the legitimation of science by reference to something other than itself – the idea being that, as the parts compose the whole and the whole comprises the parts, so the sciences compose wisdom and wisdom comprises the sciences.*

According to Rule 2, one should pay attention only to those objects for whose certain and indubitable knowledge the natural intelligence appears to be adequate. *The argument is that it is ignorant to think that one does not (or cannot) know what one does (or can) know.* Depending on the translation, 'knowledge' is defined as 'certain and evident cognition' or 'science' is defined as 'certain and evident knowledge', so that *evidence* emerges as essential. *Arithmetic* and *geometry* are assessed as sciences that exemplify *certain*

[169] See ibid., p. 431: '… omnes quaestiones imperfectae ad perfectas reduci possint …'.
[170] Cf. R. 5, § 1 (AT, X, 379–380).

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